

Stop Intelligence Leaks, Not Printing Presses

The head of the super-secret National Security Agency has confirmed what everybody seemed to know except Ronald Reagan and his advisers — that administration officials have been a far bigger source of intelligence leaks than Congress has been.

Which makes the NSA director's plan for plugging the leaks seem as illogical as it is ill-conceived: Lt. Gen William Odom wants to prosecute news organizations for printing intelligence details that public officials leak.

Because of breaches in security, Odom contends, his agency's electronic spy network has suffered "deadly losses" — he won't say what that means — in its ability to tap into the confidential communications of terrorists and other enemies of state. That's serious, but it's no more frightening — or potentially damaging to the security of the country — than the idea of prosecuting the media for doing its constitutionally protected job.

So far, the Justice Department has shown uncharacteristic restraint in pursuing the

cases that Odom has passed along. Given its record on other rights issues, however, it may only be waiting for a suitable case.

While there are instances in which the press ought to exercise restraint, even in a nonwartime situation — in protecting the identity of intelligence operatives, for instance — the administration should resist any temptation to take a shot at the First Amendment. The place to stop leaks is at their source — within the government — and not by trying to intimidate the press.

The Washington Post
The New York Times
The Washington Times
The Wall Street Journal
The Christian Science Monitor
New York Daily News
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